WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT UNIT 19 - WEST DESERT

Boundary Description

Tooele, Utah, Juab, and Millard counties - Boundary begins at the Utah-Nevada state line and I-80 in Wendover; east on I-80 to the Dugway road at Rowley Junction; south on this road to the Pony Express Road; east on this road to SR-36; north on SR-36 to SR-73; east on SR-73 to I-15; south on I-15 to SR-132 at Nephi; west on SR-132 to US-6; southwest on US-6 to its junction with US-50 near Delta; west on US-50 & 6 to the Utah-Nevada state line; north along this state line to I-80 at Wendover.

Management Unit Description

Management unit 19 is subdivided into three smaller subunits, Deep Creek, Vernon, and Tintic. All trend studies within these subunits were sampled in 2002. The Deep Creek subunit is numbered 19A, and all studies within that unit are numbered accordingly. The Vernon and Tintic subunits are numbered as 19B, and the trend studies within those boundaries are numbered accordingly.

Of the total land area within unit 19, the majority are categorized as either year-long or winter range. Winter, year-long, and summer ranges respectively make up 61%, 23%, and 16% of the area. The vast majority of the land within unit 19 is managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

As with nearly all of the management units within the state, the deer herds are managed to achieve a buck to doe ratio of 15:100 with 30% of the bucks being 3-point or better. The management plan calls for a wintering population of 11,200 deer. Elk are less abundant in this management unit compared to the other units within the Central region administrative area. Most of the elk in this unit are found on the Deep Creek's (subunit 19A).

Population and Habitat Management Strategies

The Vernon subunit is currently managed under the limited entry hunting status. Other portions of unit 19 are open to general season hunting for deer. Limiting factors that may prevent management objectives being reached include crop depredation, habitat, and predation by cougars. To minimize these limiting factors, several habitat management strategies will be used. These are: 1) monitor the permanent range trend studies throughout the unit; 2) maintain and/or enhance forage production through direct range improvements throughout the unit; and 3) work with private and federal agencies to maintain and protect critical summer ranges from future losses and degradation (Deer Herd Unit Management Plan 2001).

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT UNIT - 19A - WEST DESERT, DESERT MOUNTAIN RANGES

Boundary Description

Tooele, Utah, Juab, and Millard counties - Boundary begins at the Utah-Nevada state line and I-80 in Wendover; then east on I-80 to the Dugway road at Rowley Junction; south on this road to the Pony Express Road; southwest on this road to the Dugway Valley Road; south on this road to Highway SR-174; southeast on SR-174 to Highway US-6 to it's conjunction with Highway US-50; west on US-50 & 6 to the Utah-Nevada state line; north along the Utah-Nevada state line to I-80 at Wendover and beginning point.

Management Unit Description

With few exceptions, deer summer range on the Deep Creek Mountains is generally above 7,500 feet in elevation. Quality summer range and water distribution are the limiting factors for this herd unit's deer population. There is approximately 65,654 acres of winter range in the unit. A majority of the winter range (72%) is located on BLM administered land. Very little winter range (4%) is presently in private ownership, while 6% of the land is on the Goshute Indian Reservation. The Deep Creek mountains are surrounded by winter range, from roughly 7,500 feet down to the more xeric zones of the valley floor. Forty-four percent of the winter range is located on land administered by the State of Utah either as State Trust Lands or DWR lands. The BLM administers 36% of the winter range, while 18% of the winter range is privately owned. Some year-long range was identified, most of which (87%) is located on BLM lands.

Range Trend Studies

In 1983, six key areas were identified and sampled with trend studies. Two additional studies were added in 1989. All studies within the unit were reread in 1997. In 2002, several studies were suspended and two new studies were established. Suspended studies included Sevy Canyon, Chokecherry Spring, Granite Creek, and The Basin. Sevy Canyon, Granite Creek, and The Basin all lie within BLM wilderness study areas so the transects at these locations were not read due to lack of access. The study at Chokecherry Spring was placed on Indian lands and lies within Nevada. This site is not critical range for big game and was not read after consultation with the biologist. Two new studies were established on the west side of the Deep Creek Mountains in Rocky Canyon to monitor big game use on westerly aspects that border privately owned lands.

SUMMARY

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT UNIT 19A - WEST DESERT, DESERT MOUNTAIN RANGES

Of the eight existing range trend studies in this management unit, four were reread in 2002 and four were suspended. In addition, two new studies were established. The studies in Sevy Canyon, Granite Creek, and The Basin were suspended because of access problems as these studies now lie within BLM wilderness study areas. The Sevy Canyon study was surveyed by the project leader and was noted as being poor representative site in 2002. The study at Chokecherry Spring was also suspended as it does not represent critical range for big game and lies outside state boundaries on Indian lands.

Precipitation data for this management unit was summarized using weather station data from Ibapah and Callao. Total annual precipitation and seasonal distribution of precipitation were both analyzed. During the past two decades, total annual precipitation has been normal or above normal for most years with the exception of scattered years during the late 1980's and early 1990's. Spring precipitation (March-May), which is particularly important for cool season species, was below normal for three straight seasons from 2000-2002 at Ibapah, and only 41% of normal in the spring of 2002 at Callao. Fall precipitation (September-November) was also below normal at both stations in 2001, especially at Callao (40%). Many of the vegetation changes reported in 2002 can be explained by the current drought, primarily low fall and spring precipitation preceding the 2002 sampling.

There were no upward trends reported for soils, browse, or the herbaceous component on any studies that were reread in this unit in 2002. Soil trend was downward on two sites, and stable on two others. Downward soil trends are typical during periods of drought, which result from increased bare soil and declines in vegetation and litter cover. Decreases in cover and nested frequency of herbaceous species also have additive effects on soil trend and condition. These changes in ground cover result in less protective cover on the soil surface, increasing the erosion potential on a site.

Two studies had downward browse trends in 2002, with two others remaining stable. Downward browse trends are the result of key browse populations showing increased decadence, reduced vigor, and a decline in reproduction. Stansbury cliffrose, basin big sagebrush, and shadscale represent the key browse on the studies that were resampled in 2002. The key browse showed increased decadence on three sites, decreased reproduction on three sites, and reduced vigor on all four sites that were resampled in 2002.

Herbaceous trends were slightly down on two sites, and stable on two others. The herbaceous component is often most effected by dry conditions, especially perennial forbs. Sum of nested frequency values for perennial grasses and forbs declined on three of the four sites that were reread in 2002. Average cover and nested frequency values of cheatgrass decreased on all four sites in 2002 as well. The forb component at the Trail Gulch and Wood Canyon studies is virtually non-existent, while the forb component at the Ochre Mountain and Durse Canyon studies is limited.

A trend summary table of each study follows.

Trend Summary

	Category	1983	1989	1997	2002
19A-1 Trail Gulch	soil	est	3	3	2
	browse	est	3	3	3
	herbaceous understory	est	3	3	3
19A-2 Ochre Mountain	soil	est	3	3	3
	browse	est	2	2	1
	herbaceous understory	est	3	4	3
19A-4 Durse Canyon	soil	est	4	3	3
	browse	est	3	3	3
	herbaceous understory	est	4	4	2
19A-7 Wood Canyon	soil		est	3	2
	browse		est	3	1
	herbaceous understory		est	4	2
19A-9 Rocky Canyon	soil				est
	browse				est
	herbaceous understory				est
19A-10 Rocky Spring	soil				est
	browse				est
	herbaceous understory				est

(1) = down, (2), slightly down, (3) = stable, (4) = slightly up, (5) = up
(est) = established, (n/a) = no trend, (susp) = suspended, (NR) = not read

SUSPENDED STUDIES					
	Category	1983	1989	1997	2002
19A-3 Sevy Canyon	soil	est	3	3	susp
	browse	est	3	1	susp
	herbaceous understory	est	4	2	susp
19A-5 Chokecherry Canyon	soil	est	3	3	susp
	browse	est	3	3	susp
	herbaceous understory	est	5	3	susp
19A-6 Granite Creek	soil	est	4	3	susp
	browse	est	3	2	susp
	herbaceous understory	est	5	2	susp
19A-8 The Basin	soil		est	3	susp
	browse		est	3	susp
	herbaceous understory		est	1	susp

(1) = down, (2), slightly down, (3) = stable, (4) = slightly up, (5) = up
(est) = established, (n/a) = no trend, (susp) = suspended, (NR) = not read